Matthew J. Bruccoli

Hawthorne
as a
Collector’s Item,
1885-1924*

ONE INDICATION of an author’s reputation is the amounts that collectors are willing to pay for his books. Obviously, there are many limitations on this method, for literary merit and collector appeal are not always concomitant qualities. The circumstances under which a major author was published may make his books too common for the collector, whereas a minor

* For help in preparing this article, I am greatly indebted to: Roger E. Stoddard, C. E. Frazer Clark, Jr., Peter Keisoglof, John S. Van E. Kohn, William Runge, Marcus McCorison, Miss Jane Gatliff, the American Antiquarian Society, and the Boston Public Library.
author’s books may have the combination of characteristics that makes collectors reach deep into their pockets.

Nathaniel Hawthorne is an ideal figure around which to conduct a survey of American book-collecting, for he provides a combination of rarity and literary merit. Until the Melville and James revivals of the 1920’s, his position as the great American novelist was not seriously challenged. In so far as such a thing can be determined, Hawthorne was the first American novelist to be collected seriously; and with the exception of sporadic interest in Cooper, the first rank of nineteenth-century American collectors did not bother with other American novelists. In addition to being eminently respectable, Hawthorne’s work has great collector appeal. Fanshawe, The Celestial Rail-Road, Time’s Portraiture, and The Sister Years are among the supreme rarities in American literature. Of the two carrier’s addresses, there are probably not more than three copies of Time’s Portraiture and probably not more than six of The Sister Years. The Celestial Rail-Road is particularly tantalizing to the collector because it exists with two imprints.

On the other hand, the first printings of Hawthorne’s four romances are comparatively common—or rather, all but The Scarlet Letter seem more common than they really are. The first edition of The Scarlet Letter consisted of 2,500 copies, of which a high percentage survived because of the book’s immediate success. The second edition of 2,500 copies is also a collector’s item because it adds the author’s Preface. The House of The Seven Gables, The Blithedale Romance, and The Marble Faun seem quite common because no attempt was made by the publisher to distinguish between the first printings and the reprints. The first printing of The House of the Seven Gables consisted of 1,690 copies, but there were three more printings in 1851 of 1,690, 1,051, and 1,000 copies. The first printing of The Blithedale Romance comprised 5,090 copies, and there
was a second printing in 1852 of 2,350. The first printing of The Marble Faun comprised 8,000 copies, and there were two more printings of 3,000 and 1,500 copies before the conclusion was added, and two separate printings with the conclusion of 1,000 copies each—all in 1860. Only recently has the work of the Centenary Hawthorne differentiated these concealed printings. Although this new information is expected to interest collectors, the obvious fact remains that even the true first printings were too large for real competition to result over them. Of course, collectors have always been eager to acquire association copies of even common books.

In between the great rarities and the romances, there is a group of books which are rare, but not superlatively so—Twice-Told Tales, Peter Parley's Universal History, Liberty Tree, Grandfather's Chair, Famous Old People, Biographical Stories for Children. It is clear, then, that collecting Hawthorne appeals to all purses. But this survey will of necessity concentrate on the high-spots because they are more traceable and more meaningful. In general, though, the bottom of the market will be a reflection of the top: that is, when Fanshawe or Twice-Told Tales bring whopping great prices, The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables will also be selling high.

In Hawthorne's case, at least, collector and dealer activity are significant, for the prices of his books show a steady willingness of men to back their opinions with cash. Apart from its adherence to the laws of supply and demand, there is something lawless about collecting first printings—and this is the source of its attraction. There are sound textual arguments for collecting first printings, but few collectors are textual scholars. There are sentimental excuses for collecting first printings: this is the form in which a masterpiece first appeared in print, and indeed the genius who wrote it may have held this very copy in his hands. But one wonders whether many collectors are really
persuaded by this line of thinking. It seems more likely that the serious collector is attracted primarily by the sheer challenge of the game, by the act of pitting his taste, judgment, and acquisitive instincts against those of his competitors. He is also staking his money, and that is what gives collecting its edge. Assuming that a good collector collects authors he has read and appreciates—a fair assumption—the record of Hawthorne collecting is then the record of the men who were willing to bet on their estimations of Hawthorne's enduring position in American literature. Hawthorne has had a loyal rank of brave collectors: Charles B. Foote, William Harris Arnold, George M. Williamson, J. Chester Chamberlain, Frank Maier, Stephen H. Wakeman, Owen Franklin Aldis, and W. T. H. Howe. The best of them did more than assemble libraries—they promoted Hawthorne scholarship, enlarged the canon of his work, and preserved manuscript material. Their catalogues are important reference tools—and monuments to the men.

For the purposes of this survey, 1885 may be taken as the year when the collecting of American first editions first won serious attention; for in 1885, Leon and Brother issued the first bookseller's catalogue devoted to American first editions and Beverly Chew anonymously published the first bibliography of an American author, The Longfellow Collector's Hand-Book. Before that time, serious American collectors did not collect American literature; or if they did, they collected Americana or even poetry—but not fiction. The fact that Chew did not put his name on his Longfellow work is almost certainly meaningful. Leon and Chew each appear to have felt diffident enough to preface his volume with an apologia. After making a patriotic appeal for American first editions, the Introduction to the Leon catalogue makes a good bibliographical case: "In the first editions the text appears fresh from the author's mind—before those changes which are apt to occur, either from reflection or as the result of unfavorable criticism." If, as has
been suggested, Chew wrote the Leon Introduction, his role in the rise of collecting American literature becomes quite important. In the Longfellow bibliography, Chew notes the recent interest in American first editions and “the small amount of bibliographical data obtainable in print.”

The Leon catalogue listed thirty-five items for Hawthorne, offering all for sale except Fanshawe. The highest price asked was $30.00 for The Gentle Boy. Time's Portraiture, The Sister Years, and The Celestial Rail-Road were not included, although the list claimed to include “all his work published in separate form.” Leon supplied Chew with his first American authors, chiefly poets.

In the nineties, the ground was prepared for the great collections that would be formed—and scattered—in the first decade of the twentieth century. Herbert Stuart Stone compiled, in 1893, the first checklist for collectors of American literature—apart from the Leon catalogue—First Editions of American Authors. A Harvard undergraduate at the time his book was published, Stone based his lists largely on the collections at Harvard. In the following year occurred the first important auction of a Hawthorne collection at the Foote sale. The Foote catalogue listed fifty-eight Hawthorne items which totaled $648.49, including Fanshawe ($155.00), Peter Parley's Universal History ($17.50), Twice-Told Tales ($22.00), The Gentle Boy ($34.00), Grandfather's Chair ($25.00), Famous Old People ($32.00), Liberty Tree ($25.00), The Celestial Rail-Road ($58.00), and The Scarlet Letter ($27.00). Though not in the same class as the Foote sale, the two auctions of Christian P. Roos' books contributed to the growing interest in Hawthorne collecting. In 1897, thirty-one unexceptional items brought $106.77; and in 1900, a group of thirty-four interesting books brought $333.57, the star being Peter Parley's Universal History at $30.00.

The establishment of P. K. Foley's rare-book business in
1896 was an event of signal importance for American collecting. Foley was the greatest dealer in American literature of his time—and, perhaps, of all time—and he took an active role in assembling the collections of Aldis, Wakeman, and Chamberlain. In 1897, he published *American Authors 1795–1895*, which became the standard reference tool in the field. Though it has errors and holes—Foley was not aware of *Time's Portraiture* or of the two imprints of *The Celestial Rail-Road*—Foley's book is a marked improvement over Stone's and includes solid bibliographical information. His first catalogue, September, 1897, included twenty Hawthorne items, of which the best was the *American Magazine of Useful Knowledge* ($10.00). It is curious that in Foley's first sixteen catalogues, up to 1905, there are only two unusual Hawthorne items: an unbound set of what are presumably proof sheets of *The Blithedale Romance* (catalogue 3, March, 1899—$3.00) and *The Sister Years* (catalogue 15, June, 1904—$400.00). Probably, with customers like Wakeman, Aldis, and Chamberlain, Foley found it unnecessary to catalogue his outstanding things.

Between 1903 and 1909, Foley took an active role in building the Aldis American literature collection which was presented to Yale University in 1911. Considerable bibliographical information about Hawthorne was made available during the nineties; and although these checklists were not limited in use to bibliophiles, they almost certainly reflected a growing interest in Hawthorne collecting. In 1890, John P. Anderson appended a bibliography to Moncure D. Conway's *Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, and in the same year Louise Manning Hodgkins published her "Guide to the Study of Nathaniel Hawthorne." Gardner Maynard Jones published his "Complete List of Hawthorne's Writings" in 1891; and in 1897, George M. Williamson published "A Bibliography of the Writings of Nathaniel
Luther S. Livingston, an important influence on the development of American collecting, included Hawthorne in the first of his series “The First Books of Some American Authors” in 1898.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the elements for a boom in Hawthorne collecting were available, and the centenary of his birth in 1904 brought interest to a peak.

The first important collecting event of the twentieth century was the William Harris Arnold sale in 1901, an event that has not always been recognized as having stimulated interest in American first editions by publicizing these books as investments. Arnold may have collected for the wrong reasons, but just the same he converted many people to the game. He bought his first American first edition on May 16, 1895—it is wholly typical of Arnold to have recorded the event—and, by 1898 he was able to publish his First Report of a Book-Collector, in which he displayed an unusual frankness about admitting his concern with profit in collecting books. His boasting about his sleepers must have seemed in terrible taste to the rich and conservative gentlemen collectors of the time. In 1901, Arnold was ready to dispose of his collection, which the catalogue claimed was “by far the fullest collection of First Editions, of the eight authors named, that has ever been sold.” The prices, many of them new records, attracted great attention in the collecting world, and Arnold himself was not reluctant to publicize his success. After the sale, he published an elegant catalogue giving both cost and sale prices for each item. It showed that he more than doubled his money: the cost for 709 items was $3,508.16, and the return was $7,363.17. There were sixty-four Hawthorne items in the Arnold sale, for which he had paid $572.45 and received $1,366.72. The Hawthorne high-spots were Fanshawe ($200.00 [ $410.00], Peter Parley's Universal
History ($17.50 [ $100.00], and The Celestial Rail-Road ($1.00 [$124.00]). A copy of Mosses from and old Manse, one of two in wrappers then known, appreciated from $18.00 to $62.00. Although these were bargains by today's standards—especially since Arnold was fussy about condition—they were considered remarkable in 1901. The Literary Collector was so impressed by the Arnold sale that it distributed to subscribers a list of the prices and purchasers.16

Interest in collecting Hawthorne reached a peak during 1904 and 1905. In 1904, the centenary of Hawthorne's birth, there were celebrations in Concord and Salem; Chamberlain organized the Grolier Club exhibition and compiled the informative catalogue;17 and the New York Public Library had an exhibition which Victor Hugo Paltsits catalogued in the Bulletin of the New York Public Library.18 In the same year The Literary Collector published a useful checklist, "First Editions of Hawthorne," which noted the record prices of the books.19 Appropriately, there were two important auctions in 1904. The French-Chubbuck sale had thirty-seven Hawthorne items which realized $1,099.7520—including a Fanshawe ($450.00), Peter Parley's Universal History ($72.00—the same copy had sold for $17.50 in the Foote sale), the first copy of The Sister Years to appear at auction ($290.00), and Time's Portraiture, 1853 ($60.00).

The Williamson sale in 190421 included twelve Hawthorne letters and three exciting manuscripts: "Feathertop," 20 pp. ($750.00); "The Ancestral Footstep," 88 pp. ($650.00); and the only surviving leaf of The Scarlet Letter, the title page and Table of Contents ($113.00). In 1908, 170 of Williamson's Hawthorne books brought $1,446.40.22 This remarkable collection included Fanshawe ($300.00) and The Celestial Rail-Road ($630.00). But apart from these two items the prices were very modest: the terrifically rare 1851 Scarlet Letter in wrappers brought $5.00, and dozens of books went for less than one dollar.

394
An interesting event of 1904–5 was William K. Bixby's purchase of 165 Hawthorne letters—"the love letters"—from Julian Hawthorne. Bixby permitted the Society of the Dofobs of Chicago to issue these letters in a privately printed edition of sixty-two copies in 1907.\(^\text{28}\) In 1916 and 1917, Bixby sold at auction duplicates and selections from his library, including superb Hawthorne material. The 1916 Huntington-Bixby-Church sale, billed as the greatest auction since the Hoe sale, included fifty-three of Bixby's Hawthorne items, which brought $1,651.50, a small total considering that it was nearly all manuscript or association material.\(^\text{24}\) The 1917 Huntington-Bixby sale included one lot of thirty-three letters by and to Hawthorne and his family, which went begging at $2,000.00.\(^\text{25}\) In 1918, Henry E. Huntington purchased Bixby's manuscript collection, which included 200 of Hawthorne's letters.

Luther S. Livingston's *Auction Prices of Books*\(^\text{26}\) shows that by 1904 a great deal of choice Hawthorne material was sold on a rising market. No fewer than ten Fanshawes were sold at a range of from $75.00 to $840.00. The list includes seven copies of *The Celestial Rail-Road* ($46.00–$240.00), six copies of Peter Parley's *Universal History* ($35.00–$140.00), ten copies of *Twice-Told Tales* ($10.00–$41.00), thirteen copies of *Famous Old People* ($7.50–$76.00), eleven copies of *The Gentle Boy* ($11.00–$143.00), twenty copies of *Grandfather's Chair* ($11.50–$76.00), nine copies of *Biographical Stories for Children* ($11.00–$36.50), eight copies of *Liberty Tree* ($19.00–$48.00), twenty-one copies of *The Scarlet Letter* ($6.50–$29.00), five copies of *The House of the Seven Gables* ($5.50–$9.00), five copies of *The Blithedale Romance* ($5.00–$60.00 for a presentation copy), and eleven copies of *The Marble Faun* ($7.00–$11.50).

The important Hawthorne events of 1905 were the two book-length bibliographies published by Nina E. Browne\(^\text{27}\) and
Wallace Hugh Cathcart. Both volumes are frustrating to work with and are far from definitive, but their existence demonstrates that a high point in collector interest had been reached.

Both Wakeman and Chamberlain began collecting American first editions in 1900, the year before the Arnold sale. Chamberlain purchased Chew's American authors en bloc in 1900; and in the five years left to him, he assembled a superb collection of ten authors. When catalogued for auction in 1909, there were 139 Hawthorne items which realized about $4,300, including two copies of Fanshawe, seven of Peter Parley's Universal History, Time's Portraiture (the 1838 and two copies of the 1853 edition), The Sister Years, The Celestial Rail-Road, and The Sunday School Society's Gift. The 1838 Time's Portraiture—the first to be sold at auction—brought $550. The Fanshawes brought $500 and $350; The Celestial Rail-Road brought $380, a new record; Sister Years brought $260; and the Sunday School Society's Gift, one of three known copies, brought $115. Eight volumes from Hawthorne's own library realized $1,376.

Less information is available on Frank Maier than on Chamberlain or Wakeman. If Maier's Hawthorne collection was not so good as Chamberlain's or Wakeman's, it was nonetheless splendid. His library was auctioned in 1909, nine months after Chamberlain's, and brought $22,324.00 as against $36,484.00 for Chamberlain's. His 121 Hawthorne items brought $1,202.30, a surprisingly low total. Perhaps the Chamberlain sale had temporarily satiated Hawthorne collectors, for many of Maier's rarities went low: Fanshawe—$350.00; Peter Parley's Universal History—$40.00; The Sister Years—$150.00; Time's Portraiture (1853)—$50.00; The Celestial Rail-Road—$140.00; Twice-Told Tales—$10.00. The condition of these books may have been against them, but it is still surprising to see dozens of desirable items going at one or two dollars—first editions of The House
of the Seven Gables and The Blithedale Romance, for example, brought $1.25 each. Aldis was an active buyer at the Chamberlain and Maier sales, as was Walter T. Wallace. When Wallace’s books were sold in 1920, some Hawthorne items totaled about $3,200.00: The Sister Years—$130.00; The Sunday School Society’s Gift—$240.00; Time’s Portraiture, 1838—$450.00 (these three had been bought at the Chamberlain sale); Time’s Portraiture, 1853—$320.00 (the Maier copy); and two pages of the manuscript of Time’s Portraiture, $200.00.31

Wakeman started collecting in 1900 and found it necessary to retire from business in 1904 to devote all his time to his library. During the centenary year, he had privately printed from the manuscript thirty copies of Twenty Days with Julian and Little Bunny. Like the good collector he was, Wakeman had one copy printed on vellum for himself. In 1909, he sold his fabulous collection of manuscripts—including The Blithedale Romance, Dr. Grimshawe’s Secret, The Dolliver Romance, Septimius Felton, and Hawthorne’s journals—through George S. Hellman to J. Pierpont Morgan for $165,000.32 Of Wakeman’s books, which were sold at auction in 1924, John S. Van E. Kohn has written: “This sale dispersed the greatest collection of the nine Wakeman authors ever assembled . . . no comparable collection, take it for all and all, could ever be formed again.”33 The auction catalogue prepared from Wakeman’s notes by Arthur Swann has become an indispensable tool for Hawthorne scholars.34 Wakeman’s 179 Hawthorne items brought $9,770, not a high total considering the quantity of inscribed material. Wakeman had Time’s Portraiture, The Sister Years, and both imprints of The Celestial Rail-Road—the only time all four have ever appeared, or will ever appear, in the same sale.

There were bargains in the Wakeman sale. Barton Currie
remarks that many dealers and collectors were unenthusiastic about it—though he doesn’t explain why—and that Rosenbach, Wells, and Sessler “hold aloof.” W. T. H. Howe was a leading purchaser, and some of his acquisitions were wonderful buys by today’s standards. Fanshawe, the copy which had brought $410 at the Arnold sale and which Wakeman had paid $450 for, was sold to Howe for $1,025. The copy of *Twice-Told Tales* inscribed by Hawthorne as a betrothal gift to Sophia Peabody had been purchased by Wakeman from Julian Hawthorne for $450; Howe paid $1,000 for it. The copy of *Time’s Portraiture* that Howe paid $325 for had been purchased by Wakeman for $75.00. Howe bought four first editions of *The Scarlet Letter*, including Sophia Hawthorne’s copy ($400—Wakeman had paid $100) and a presentation copy from Hawthorne to his sister Elizabeth ($350—Wakeman paid $125). *The Sister Years* brought $250. The Fish imprint of *The Celestial Rail-Road* brought $140 and the Wilder $160—well under the $380 brought by Chamberlain’s Wilder. For some reason, Hawthorne’s copy of the *Laws of Bowdoin College* with eight Hawthorne-Hathorne signatures went for only $27.50. It brought $1,125 five years later in the Kern sale.

The great era of Hawthorne-collecting—and, indeed, of the collecting of nineteenth-century American authors—closed with the Wakeman sale. Many of the treasures owned by Aldis, Williamson, Chamberlain, Maier, and Wakeman have found their way to the Morgan Library, the New York Public Library, the Huntington Library, the Yale Library, and the Alderman Library of the University of Virginia. Which is where they belong, unfortunately.

**POSTSCRIPT**

After the Wakeman sale, American collecting—and Hawthorne-collecting—changed. It is probably too simple to blame this change on the financial conditions of the 1930’s. For one
thing, the old breed of collectors typified by Chamberlain and Wakeman died out with these men; for another thing, the younger collectors turned their attention to younger reputations—Melville, James, Twain, and the twentieth-century authors.

No great Hawthorne collections were dispersed during the thirties and forties, although some great items were sold. Two magnificent groups of material from the Hawthorne family appeared in 1931. In April, seventeen lots of letters to and from Hawthorne or his family—"The Property of a Descendant of Hawthorne"—brought $5,437.85 at auction. The star was a letter from Hawthorne to his sister Elizabeth, dated October 1, 1824, which sold for $900.00. A letter from Oliver Wendell Holmes about The Scarlet Letter brought $1,450.00. In November, forty-six superb books and manuscripts owned by Miss Rebecca B. Manning brought $10,099.50. The top prices were $2,200 each for inscribed copies of Peter Parley's Universal History and Mosses from an Old Manse in wrappers. An inscribed copy of The Scarlet Letter brought $1,300.00. The books did better than the manuscripts. The highest price brought by a letter was $430.00 for what is apparently the earliest known Hawthorne letter, to Robert Manning, December 9, 1813. Hawthorne's fifteen-page constitution of the Pin Society sold for only $340.00; and the five-page constitution of the Pot-8-O Club, for $375.00.

The 1945 Frank J. Hogan sale had only twelve Hawthorne items, including the December 9, 1813, letter which brought $500.00. The nineteen items in the 1960 Arthur Swann sale did not include any great pieces, but the books were distinguished by their fine condition. The most recent appearance of a major Hawthorne item was in November, 1963, when the manuscript of "A London Suburb"—the largest Hawthorne manuscript to appear at auction since 1904—was sold for $5,500.00.

At least four superb Hawthorne collections have been
assembled since the twenties. The catalogue of Carroll A. Wilson's library includes some hundred Hawthorne pieces, many of which are association items. Two magnificent collections, still in the process of growth, are the C. Waller Barrett collection, at the University of Virgina, and the collection of C. E. Frazer Clarke, Jr. A fourth notable collection is owned by Parkman D. Howe.